


Oxford Core Strategy Examination Statement of Oxford City Council		www.oxford.gov.uk  OXFORD CITY COUNCIL
C/M8/1	Matter 8 – The Strategic locations Issue 1 – Northern Gateway	

i) What process led to the identification of this area? Why is it considered to be a sustainable location for development?

Considering in brief the historical context of the land at Peartree. The Inspector at the last Local Plan Inquiry (CD 7/7) (2001-2016) stated in Para.4.5.8 in relation to the St. Johns' land at Peartree that in accordance with the criteria in Annex B PPG2 ,“it can be taken that the land is genuinely capable of development when needed; also located where future development would be an efficient use of land, promoting sustainable development.” The Inspector however took the view at the time that this site was not needed for development within the Plan period. However he considered “it may be needed to meet the long term needs of Oxford and should continue to be safeguarded with this role in mind.”

Oxford’s Employment Land Study (March 2006) (CD14/27) was commissioned by the City Council to inform the evidence base for the Local Development Framework. It was carried out by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners. The study provided a thorough assessment of Oxford’s future demand for employment land in the context of its important economic role. It considered how this demand could be accommodated in the context of both existing brownfield sites, and the opportunities that could be provided by strategic locations such as the ‘safeguarded land,’ (map 17 in Core Strategy).

This study is a robust piece of work. A recent audit of Employment Land Reviews, carried out by DTZ on behalf of SEERA, refers to this study in Oxford as an example of best practice, in terms of geographical coverage, qualitative appraisals and in producing good scenarios. It is one of the few employment land studies to be directly referred to at the Examination into the South East Plan (CD10/3).

At the Preferred Options stage (March 2007) the ‘safeguarded land’ at Peartree was put forward as a strategic location for principally employment use. The public response to this option was supportive. The Preferred Option had the highest proportion of people agreeing / strongly agreeing with it and the lowest proportion 30% disagreeing / disagreeing strongly.

Oxford is a compact sustainable city. The Northern Gateway area whilst on the edge of the urban area is only some 4.5 Km (2.8 miles) from the heart of the city

centre at Carfax. The area itself is split by one of the main arterial roads leading into the City centre and adjacent to the Pear Tree Park and Ride, which is obviously served by a regular bus service.

ii) Are there better alternative sites to this?

Firstly, land supply in Oxford is scarce, and in demand from a competing range of uses. Land has been lost from employment to other uses, such as residential. The City Council has pursued a sustainable policy, which has sought to make the best use of 'brownfield sites' by seeking to protect a range of key employment sites and promote their modernisation.

In addition to the protection of existing sites, the Employment Land Study (CD14/27) identified a need for a strategic employment land allocation for Oxford. The consultants considered sites within the West End. The broad policy approach in the West End is for a vibrant mixed-use development, which should comprise a range of key town centre uses, including residential development. Office accommodation is expected in the range of 15-20,000 m² of additional floor space, together with new joint City and County offices.

The Employment Land Study (CD14/27) considered the three principal areas of 'safeguarded land.' The purpose of the designation of these sites was to exclude them from the Green Belt, with the intention that they are held in reserve to meet the future development needs of Oxford. Each of these sites were assessed by the consultants in Appendix 12 of the study against 10 criteria. Both Barton and Pear Tree were considered to be suitable for some employment use. Pear Tree scored the highest, the consultants concluding that 'overall accessibility, prominence and limited constraints make this site highly suitable for a range of employment uses.'

During the course of the Preferred Options stage (March 2007) uses for the three strategic locations were explored (Pear Tree, Barton and Summertown). The Preferred Option for land at Pear Tree that emerged, with public support, was for the site to be allocated for a modern employment-led development to include other complementary uses. Of the two other sites Summertown was considered to be suitable for residential (in the future if needed), whilst Barton was considered to be most suited to residential given the pressing need for housing together with its wider regeneration potential.

The Northern Gateway is therefore the only strategic site suitable and available to meet the identified need for future employment land in Oxford.

iii) What impact would this development have on areas outside the City?

An 'Economic Case for the development of land at Peartree' (CD14/15) was prepared by SQW. It highlights in para 2.11 the importance of the high-tech sector in Oxfordshire's economy, and the support infrastructure network that has been developed. The study recognises the key role that Oxford's two universities play in promoting enterprise and entrepreneurship. Para 2.16 explains how Oxford acts as the hub for the Central Oxfordshire Diamond for Investment and Growth, which fulfils an important role in delivering the Regional Economic Strategy (CD10/5) . Oxford therefore has a positive role to play in acting as a key driver for growth in the high-tech and knowledge based economies. In summary the consultants say, "there can be little doubt that the research strengths, highly skilled graduates and reputation of Oxford has encouraged the growth of high-tech businesses elsewhere in Oxfordshire."

The strategy for Central Oxfordshire, in the South East Plan (SEP) (CD10/1), is to strive to be a world leader in education, science and technology by building on the sub-region's economic strengths. Oxford is identified as one of the main locations for development, along with Bicester, Didcot, and Wantage and Grove, to improve their self-containment. The City Council considers that growth in Oxford can take place in a positive sense and bring wider benefits to other areas outside the city, such as Bicester. This accords with the broad aims of the SEP as set out in Para.22.5, which states that "Oxford itself will be allowed to grow physically and economically in order to accommodate its own needs, contribute to the wider region and help maintain its world-class status".

The County Council has raised a particular concern about the potential impact of the Northern Gateway on economic development on Bicester. However Bicester operates in a different employment market to Oxford. The Cherwell Employment Land Study shows that there are little existing B1 uses at Bicester, and a relatively slow take-up rate. The amount of land allocated in the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011, combined with land identified through the URS Employment Land Study 2005 employment land survey provides almost 15 years of supply, primarily land for warehousing. Historically, the greatest demand has been for B8 class use.

The City Council believe that an employment-led development at the Northern Gateway will foster the importance of the knowledge-based businesses in the Central Oxfordshire area. This is likely to attract further growth in the future, which could potentially be located at Bicester. Indeed Cherwell District Council themselves have made no representations to the Northern Gateway proposals, which has also been confirmed through recent discussions with Mary Hartley.

iv) What land is likely to be available for development?

The 'safeguarded land' represents the principal opportunity for development (Map 3 Core Strategy). This comprises land owned by St. Johns' College, to the north of the A40 and Worcester College's land, to the east of the A44. The future development of this land is being promoted by the Consortium, which comprise Goodman and Kier Properties, who have an options agreement with the owners.

Potential development opportunities also exist on land within the immediate area, which will be explored through the Area Action Plan process. Land owned by Merton College, which includes the service area to the north adjacent to the A34. The Consortium seeks to promote this land on behalf of Merton.

Land to the south of the A40 is owned by St. John's College. This is in the Green Belt, but has the potential to form part of the development site, subject to a focused Green Belt review. This would be considered in the context of the AAP process. This review would also include land in the Green belt at Peartree Hill farm owned by Merton College.

Finally as part of the Area Action Plan process consideration could also be given to other potential development opportunities that may arise such as for example, improvements and re-organisation of the Park and Ride; and possible regeneration potential for the triangle of land to the north-west of Wolvercote Roundabout. This includes the Telephone Repeater Station, BMW garage and BP petrol filling station. The area of search would not include the land at Goose Green, which is common land and is used as a sports pitch.

v) Why has the particular mix of uses been identified, bearing in mind concerns about the balance between housing and employment?

The land at Peartree was considered for development at the previous Local Plan Inquiry (CD7/7). Whilst the inspector took the view that the need for the development of the site had not been demonstrated, he did provide some useful indications of the uses that may be appropriate.

In relation to housing, and in particular the land owned by Worcester College, the Inspector did not rule it out completely, although in para. 14.1.16 he identified a number of obstacles that had to be overcome. These included the importance of integrating development within the urban fabric of Oxford; dealing with traffic noise, and mitigating traffic impacts. But in the following paragraph the Inspector was reluctant to say that the site is unsuitable for residential development in principle. In his view as the supply of housing land becomes more limited, compromises may have to be made. In this context he took the view that a comparative assessment of competing options would be the way forward. This should be the subject of full

engagement with the local community on the choices to be made. The Inspector concluded however that he was persuaded that the site should not be allocated for residential development at that point in time.

In relation to St. Johns' College land at Peartree and the potential for employment use, the Inspector in para.4.5.11 expected that demand would remain high, but at the time felt this demand had to be dampened in order to meet the established (previous) Structure Plan policies of 'restraint' in Oxford. Whilst housing was put forward by the college as the principal future land use for the site, the Inspector took the view that there was no significant strategic need identified over and above the sites already allocated for housing, and no appreciable imbalance between housing supply and strategic housing requirement.

During the course of the preparation of the Core Strategy and particularly through the Preferred Options stage, this site was considered more suitable for an employment-led development. This was in recognition of the suitability of the site for employment use, together with the environmental and traffic obstacles for its use as a strategic housing site.

In this context the site was not considered suitable as a strategic housing allocation but more suited as an employment-led development. This reflects the need for more land identified in the Employment Land Study (CD14/27) and for the City Council to fulfil its role as the hub of a Diamond for Investment and Growth. The types of uses are principally Class B1 that relate to Oxford's key sectors, and aim to positively build on the established knowledge-based infrastructure.

The complementary uses could include any of the following range of uses, the emergency services, residential, small retail units and a hotel. As a result of the West End Area Action Plan (CD7/5) it became clear that there was an opportunity for some of the emergency services, in particular the Fire Service, to move from their City centre sites to an area nearer the ring road. During the course of the Core Strategy, therefore, discussions have been held with all the key emergency services with a view to offering the opportunity for a joint centre at the Northern Gateway. This would bring potential benefits in terms of faster response times and freeing up land in the City centre.

The site was not considered suitable in the SHLAA (CD15/1) as a strategic housing site. An element of residential use would potentially promote the sustainability of the site and positively contribute to the balance between housing and employment.

Small retail units are proposed to serve the proposed development and make it more sustainable. Future occupiers of both the employment and housing uses will

then not need to travel significant distance from the Northern Gateway Area. At present this area of the city is not well served by such facilities and is strategically located some distance from the nearest District shopping centre at Summertown. It will be key to ensure that the amount and range of retail provision at the Northern Gateway does not affect the vitality and viability of Summertown district centre.

Finally a hotel was included as a possible alternative use. A recent study (CD 14/9) on short-stay accommodation identified this area as a suitable location for additional provision. There may also be potential regeneration opportunities, such as at the service area, where existing hotel accommodation may need to be replaced by new buildings.

vi) What potential constraints are there, particularly in relation to access and impact upon the highway network, and how can these be overcome?

A significant constraint to development relates to access and impact on the highway network. The Northern Gateway area experiences significant peak-hour congestion and the County Council have developed proposals for highway improvements as part of the 'Access to Oxford' package. Since 2006 the City Council has been working in partnership with the Northern Gateway Consortium, Highways Agency and County Council evaluating the transport impacts arising from the development of the Northern Gateway. Guiding principles on how the developers will be expected to minimise its impact on the strategic and local transport networks are being developed through comprehensive travel planning and improvements to the highway infrastructure. These measures will ensure that traffic congestion is not worsened by the development and complements the proposed improvements to the northern approaches.

A Statement of Common Ground has been agreed between the City Council and the Highways Agency. Both parties agree that:

- a key element required to ensure the delivery (in transport terms) of the City's LDF is a comprehensive mitigation strategy for the Northern Gateway Area;
- close partnership working has already taken place to agree a sound means of assess the impact of the proposals and identify mitigation measures; and
- a computer generated transport model has been produced and approved to model existing road conditions and to use as a base year from which to assess the impact of development options on the existing network, and test possible mitigation solutions.

vii) Can concerns about the impact upon the Oxford Meadows be acceptably accommodated?

The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) considers in detail the possible environmental impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC. It assesses the effects of

development on air quality, water quality and water levels. In relation to air quality it concluded that as a result of the development proposed by the Core Strategy it would be “unlikely to have a significant effect on the Oxford Meadows SAC.” Even taking into account ‘in combination’ impacts this was not considered to be significant.

In relation to water quality, the impact of development at the Northern Gateway has been discussed with the Environment Agency. It was considered that the developments resulting from the Core Strategy are “unlikely to have a significant effect on the Oxford Meadows.” In addition there are saved policies in the adopted Local Plan that ensure that new development will not cause deterioration in surface or groundwater quality. This issue will be covered in more detail in the Area Action Plan.

Finally turning to hydrology, the Environment Agency considered that the Core Strategy proposals would be unlikely to have a significant impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC. Policy CS11 in the Core Strategy seeks to minimise the use of water resources. In addition Policy Cs12 (flooding) and CS.6 (Northern Gateway) require sustainable drainage measures to be undertaken for new developments. In the context of these mitigation measures, the HRA concludes that the impact of the Core Strategy proposals is unlikely to have a significant effect on the balanced hydrological regime of the Oxford Meadows SAC.

Consultants, Peter Brett Associates have undertaken a hydrogeological review for the Northern Gateway Area. The study assessed the potential direct and indirect effects of the proposed development on nature conservation areas, in particular the Oxford Meadows SAC. It shows that the site mainly overlies impermeable Oxford Clay, which is a non-aquifer; groundwater flow is imperceptible within the clay. Development over or within the Oxford Clay is therefore considered to be unlikely to impact on the existing hydrogeological conditions in the area. There is therefore a reasonable prospect that new development is unlikely to have a significant hydrogeological impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC, SLINC, SSSI and other nature conservation areas. Nevertheless it is recommended that a surface water drainage strategy is developed to ensure that surface water run-off does not impact on the hydrology of the nature conservation sites.

viii) Can concerns about the impact on residential amenity be overcome?

It is acknowledged that this area already experiences significant traffic noise and disturbance, given the predominance of major roads in this locality. The highways and transport mitigation measures will be developed together with ‘Access to Oxford’ improvements to ensure that traffic congestion is not worsened. In addition policies CS14 and CS15 in the Core Strategy require all developments to ensure that

schemes prioritise access by walking, cycling and public transport. This will bring positive transport benefits to the area.

The master planning of the site will provide greater certainty as to the mix and location of the new development and its relationship to existing residents. This would allow the opportunity to consider in more detail potential measures to mitigate the impact of the development of the Northern Gateway on residents. This could include new landscaping, fencing or mounding which could provide positively mitigate future noise and disturbance.

In relation to the Emergency services, this proposal would bring positive potential benefits for the operation of these services by bringing quicker response times and in meeting the wider needs of the community of Oxford as a whole.

New residential development proposals would be required to provide further supplementary evidence on noise levels and mitigation measures. This should relate to the precise siting of the new housing, high standards of sound insulation for these properties together with landscaping such as 'bundling' to ensure that future occupiers did not suffer from undue noise and disturbance, particularly from road traffic.

ix) What infrastructure does successful delivery depend upon?

The implementation of the transport mitigation measures will be crucial to the successful development of the Northern Gateway. The transport consultants (Peter Brett Associates) have prepared a transport strategy, which has been developed in partnership with the Highways Agency and the County Council, to reduce the need to travel, promote sustainable travel choices and accessibility, and link with the wider 'Access to Oxford' proposals to mitigate the potential impacts of the new development. CD

The principal utility providers were consulted on the Core Strategy, but raised no objections in principle to the Northern Gateway proposals. Assessments have been carried out on a range of infrastructure requirements, such as surface and foul water drainage, electricity, gas, and water supply requirements. Of these insufficient capacity has been raised within the existing electricity supply network; although normally this can be accommodated through more detailed discussions with the suppliers.

In relation to social infrastructure, the County Council in their representations have confirmed that the proposed number of dwellings "is not large enough on its own to require a new school." The catchment areas would however need to be amended

in this area to accommodate children generated from the new residential development.

x) What happens if the constraints cannot be overcome?

The City Council and the Consortium have worked in partnership with the Highways Agency and County Council over the last 3 years to seek a full understanding of the present position, and to produce a strategy for mitigating the potential highways impact of this development. In this context and given the representations from the Highways Agency there is a reasonable prospect that the mitigation measures would successfully resolve the transport concerns. A Statement of Common Ground, on these matters has been agreed with the Highways Agency.

The other potential constraint is the impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC. Further work has been carried out by consultants in relation to the hydrogeological impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC to satisfy concerns expressed by Natural England, the conclusions of which are set out in response to question 7. This does recommend that sustainable drainage measures need to be developed to mitigate any impact from run-off.

The contingency in the event of the mitigation approaches proposed to date, would be:

- firstly to re-evaluate and strengthen the mitigation measures put forward eg. specify restraint on car parking; or
- re-consider the mix of uses, and or the type of employment proposed; or
- re-consider the phasing programme for the development; or
- consider reducing the overall scale and density of the development;

xi) When is development likely to come forward?

The development of the employment element of the proposal would be likely to commence in early 2012 and be completed in ten years by 2022. It is anticipated that the phasing of this development, together with the complementary uses, would be explored in more detail at the AAP stage, through a detailed Implementation Plan.

xii) Should the Core Strategy consider the need for safeguarding land for future improvements to the strategic highway network?

It is considered that the appropriate mechanism for protecting land for potential improvement to the strategic highway network would be through the master planning of the site and the consideration of the location of the land uses through the Area Action Plan. The master planning process will highlight potential improvements to the local road network, which may include a new gyratory road or improvements to the main roundabouts.

xiii) Should the Core Strategy remove the safeguarded route for the GTE (rapid transit)?

The Guided Transit Express (GTE) was a major transport project, which comprised a high quality light rapid transit system. The GTE offered the flexibility of running both on guideway and the ordinary road system. This should be considered through the master planning of the site in an Area Action Plan.

xiv) Is an Area Action Plan the best way of progressing development here?

The Area Action Plan is considered by the City Council to:

- be the most appropriate means of delivering the development of the site;
- provide the best framework for taking forward the proposed transport mitigation measures in partnership with key agencies;
- offers the opportunity to define the boundaries of the Northern Gateway Area and explore potential regeneration and or new development opportunities on areas of land in addition to the 'safeguarded land';
- provides the appropriate framework for carrying out a highly focussed Green Belt review;
- provides the best framework for master planning the area. It allows meaningful engagement with key stakeholders, amenity bodies, and the local community to create an agreed vision and a much-needed 'sense of place' for the Northern Gateway area.
- provides a good framework for the Sustainability Appraisal to develop and test alternative options in tandem with the plan-making process.